2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

[p. 95]

7. *In the Mapou Tree: Magic, Demons, and Compacts*

It is said by many Haitians that the loa are inclined to shun the mapou tree, for it is the secret rendezvous of countless kinds of demons. On certain nights, they say, you may see a chink of light showing through the trunk of the great mapou, indicating that the demons are in macabre session. 796 798 824

Sometimes it is the baka who meet there to feast and discuss their blood-curdling plans. The baka are described as small and evil creatures, human in form, with red eyes, and legs or arms covered with skin but no flesh. They change into animals at will and may roam the countryside as cats, dogs, or cattle. The baka are notorious sorcerers, and they perform only malevolent acts. They are reputed to "eat people," literally as well as figuratively. Stories are heard of such-and-such a man or child who disappeared and was presumed to have been eaten at a feast in the mapou tree. One man who passed a mapou in the dark of night reported that he heard muffled singing coming from within its trunk, accompanied by the pounding of mortars in which a gruesome feast was being pulverized. But the baka "eat" people also in the sense that they destroy them. It is said sometimes that a person with a withered arm or leg has been "eaten" by a baka. Perhaps he was an innocent victim; possibly he struck a horse or dog which was really a baka; or perhaps he simply brushed against a baka in the market place. Sometimes the baka directs his evil in the most indiscriminate sort of way, "eating" whatever human being he meets. Animals which behave strangely are suspected of being baka in disguise, and they are given wide berth. 796 825 776 [732]

A cow once found within an old brick-covered spring was taken to be a baka because no cow could have passed through the small doorway of the spring. It was assumed that she had entered as a small baka and had then changed to her animal form. The spring went unused for days, until some children reported that the baka had vanished. The cow was